

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
FLOOR STATEMENT ON NASA CONFERENCE REPORT
December 17, 2005

Mr. Chairman:

I urge support for this important Conference Report, the first NASA authorization in five years. We take up this Conference Report at a critical time for the nation's space policy as NASA is laying out the policies and seeking the funding to set its course for the next 15 years or so.

This bill will give the agency clear guidance, while giving Congress important new tools for oversight at this pivotal time.

Most important, I believe, this bill, in its very first section, makes clear that NASA is to remain a multi-mission agency with robust programs in science and aeronautics, even as it moves ahead with the President's Vision for Space Exploration. And the bill also provides a clear and unequivocal endorsement of that Vision.

The bill also ensures that Congress will have the information it needs to guide and monitor NASA. It requires multi-year plans for aeronautics and science so that all NASA programs have a clear and well articulated path, and it requires plans for facilities and workforce so we can see what assets NASA will need to achieve its goals. The bill prevents any layoffs from occurring before March 16, 2007.

The bill requires updated information on the cost of the Crew Exploration Vehicle (CEV) before NASA awards a development contract, and it requires that NASA provide a range of cost estimates for the CEV along with the potential impact of each of those estimates on other programs.

And the bill applies a version of the “Nunn-McCurdy” rules to NASA. These rules will not only require NASA to notify Congress early on of any significant cost overruns, but will require Congressional action if a program breaches a specified cap. This may turn out to be one of the most important provisions in the bill.

The bill also gives NASA the authority it has been seeking to offer larger prizes to encourage a broad range of scientists and engineers to help NASA meet specific technological challenges.

And the bill establishes a new account structure that will make it easier for Congress to track NASA spending and to ensure that money is spent for the programs intended.

Finally, the authorization levels in the bill make clear that NASA cannot possibly accomplish everything that is now on its plate with the funding it is currently projected to receive.

I should add that, for me, the authorization levels do not mean that NASA necessarily should receive the authorized amount for fiscal 2007; the appropriated level needs to take account of trade-offs and what is available to other agencies, particularly to other science programs. But the authorization levels do clearly mean that NASA will need either to get more money or to forgo or delay activities.

I need to say right now – even though no one will want to hear it during this debate – that I do not think we should accelerate CEV development unless key federal science programs are adequately funded. Launching the CEV in 2014 rather than 2012 won’t damage the country, but allowing the erosion of our scientific enterprise will cause real damage.

But that's a battle for next year. Right now, we should all come together to endorse this Conference Report, which will give NASA needed authority and guidance and will give Congress tools and a context for future debates.

This bill represents a true compromise. For example, I am not fond of several of the provisions relating to the International Space Station, but they were reasonable elements of a negotiated package that represents the broad range of views of NASA in this Congress.

We were able to pull together such a package because everyone was willing to be reasonable. And I want especially to thank Mr. Calvert, who sponsored this bill and who heads our Space Subcommittee, for his unlikely combination of persistence and cooperation. I also want to thank Mr. Gordon and Mr. Udall, who were true partners in these efforts. And I want to thank all the conferees in both bodies for their openness and hard work.

This is a thoughtful, reasonable, bipartisan compromise, and I urge its adoption.